

The Aaron Wills House
Near Centreton, Westhampton Township
Burlington County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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The Aaron Wills House
Near Centreton, Westhampton Township
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Owner: (and occupant) Frank McIlhvaine (1940)

Dates of Erection: 1682-1700, and rebuilt 1786

Architect: Unknown

Builders: (1) John Wills (1660-1746) and
(2) Aaron Wills (1734-1805)

Present Condition: Original, very well preserved

Number of Stories: Two, with cellar and garret, also
a one story leanto

Materials of Construction:

Foundation - stone to grade line

Exterior walls - brick for the house, frame
for the leanto

Interior walls - plaster on brick or on
lath on studding

Chimneys - brick, one built into inside of
each gable end wall, on the ridge line

Roof - gable, wood shingled; porch not
original

Historical Data:

The identification of this composite house
has been made by search of contemporary records of the
title and of the family of Wills as follows:

By deed of 22 January 1676/7, William Penn,
Gawen Lawrie, Nicholas Lucas, and Edward Billinge
conveyed to William Biddle of Bishopsgate St., London,
shoemaker, Thomas Ollive of Wellingsborough, Northampton
County, haberdasher, and Daniel Wills of the town and
County of Northampton, practioner in chymestry, one
share of West New Jersey.(a) Two of these grantees,

(a) N.J. Archives, Vol. 21, pp. 441 and 350.

Thomas Ollive and Daniel Wills, with seven others, were sent from London by the Proprietors of West New Jersey as commissioners to purchase the lands from the Indians, to order lands laid out for the settlers, and to administer the Government generally. They arrived in the ship "Kent" at New Castle on the Delaware 16th of 6 mo. 1677 and landed the 230 passengers at Raccoon Creek (Gloucester County, New Jersey) before proceeding further to the site of Burlington.(b)

Daniel Wills, one of the three grantees abovesaid, having arrived in 1677, had 500 acres of his share of land laid out on the north bank of Rancocas Creek alias Northampton River (which latter name was evidently derived from that of his former home in England) between the estates of Thomas Green (John Paine, Atty.) on the west and Thomas Ollive on the east,(c) the survey being dated 21 December 1681. He was accordingly the first settler, or one of the first, in that part of Northampton Township which in 1850 was set off as Westhampton. It is said that he went to the Island of Barbadoes in connection with the estate of his brother William Wills, deceased, that he died 26 March 1698 and that he was buried in Friends cemetery there.(d) He was one of the most influential men in the early history of Burlington County, a signer of the "Concessions and Agreements" of the Proprietors 1676, and for many years a member of the Council of the Governor of West New Jersey.

- (b) Smith, History of New Jersey, publ. 1765, reprint 1877, pp. 92-93
- (c) See diagram of lands on Rancocas Creek, as laid out in 1680-1690, opp. p. 510 in Woodward and Hageman's History of Burlington and Mercer Counties (1883)
- (d) Woodward and Hageman, History of Burlington and Mercer Counties, N.J. (1883) pp. 504-505, a pedigree of Wills compiled from records of Samuel Wills (1765-1852)

However, the will of Daniel Wills, the progenitor, dated 25 March 1698, describes him as of Northampton, Burlington County, New Jersey, 65 years of age, devises his estate to his children, James, Daniel, John, Mary and Ann, and appoints son John as sole executor. It was proved 30 March 1700, nearly two years after testator's death. The inventory of his estate, dated 8 October 1698, includes a lot in High St., Burlington, valued at 125 Pounds; a plantation on Northampton River, at 200 pds.; other real estate 85 Pds., and personal property at 417 Pds.(e) The children of Daniel Wills, all but the youngest having been born in England, were James 1655, Daniel 1658, John 1660, of whom further, Samuel 1667, Mary 1677 (who married Thomas Olive 1691), Joseph 1673, Elizabeth 1675, and Ann 1677.(d)

John² Wills born in Northampton, England, 9 July 1660, evidently came with his father Daniel Wills abovesaid in 1677 to West New Jersey. By deed of 20 March 1697/8, the latter, as Daniel Wills gentleman, conveyed to his son John Wills yeoman, a 467 acre tract on the south bank of Rancoccus Creek, between the lands of William Allen on the southeast and widow Elton on the southwest. By the will of his father, cited above, John Wills received some 625 acres at the forks of the Rancoccus Creek which testator had received in the partition by deed of 6 October 1693 of the land purchased by him, William Biddle, and Thomas Ollive in 1677 from William Penn et al. as abovesaid, being one quarter thereof(f), and which included the homestead. John Wills thus became master, and continued residence in the house(which

(e) N.J. Archives, Vol. 23, p. 513 (Abstract of Wills)

(f) N.J. Archives, Vol. 21, p. 442 (Abstract of Deeds)

evidently he altered or enlarged, about 1700, (as see photograph of door hardware bearing his initials)* which has since been rebuilt and incorporated in the house of 1786 here surveyed. John Wills was one of the Proprietors of West New Jersey 1712-1721, and a member of the Governor's Council. He died 17 February 1746.

By his will of 17th of 9 mo. (Nov.) 1745, proved 26 February 1746, John Wills of Northampton Twp., Burlington County, "being in the 86th year" of his age, devised to his son Daniel the tract of land where he lives, "which I had of my Father Daniel Wills" on Burlington Road and adjoining Thomas Green (being the homestead farm here considered), to his wife Elizabeth the use of a room in the said house during her widowhood, to his son James and wife Sarah and sons the ferry flat on the Rancocas, and other bequests to son John, to the children of daughter Hope, wife of Freedom Lippincott, to daughters Elizabeth wife of Samuel Lippincott, and Anne wife of Jonathan Ladd, and to the children of daughter Rebecca wife of William Tomlinson.(g)

By his first wife Hope Delafosso, whom he had married at Burlington Meeting House on 26th of 10 Mo. 1682(h) John Wills had issue, John 1684 who died before 1703, Hope 1687, Daniel 1689, of whom further, and by her or by a second wife had Jane 1692, who married Samuel Eves, James 1694, Elizabeth 1697, and Ann 1699, and by a third wife Elizabeth Framton whom he married in 1701, he had Sarah 1701, John 2nd 1703, and Rebecca 1705.(d)

(g) N.J. Archives, Vol. 30, p. 535 (Abstract of Wills)

(h) Hinshaw, Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy, Vol. 2 (1938), records of Burlington Mo. Mtg.

* Shown on detail drawings also. W for John Wills and wife Hope who were married I H 1682. ~~She~~ He was deceased by 1701; hence this hardware on a door found discarded in an outbuilding is evidence of the original house built between those two dates.

Daniel³ Wills, born in the homestead on Rancocas Creek, in Northampton Twp., 1689, eldest son and devisee abovesaid, succeeded his father therein accordingly. By his wife Elizabeth Woolston, daughter of John, whom he had married at Springfield Meeting House on 13th of 8 mo. 1714, and who died 29th of 9 mo. 1754 aged 60, he had issue: Joseph 1715, Hope 1721 wife of Benjamin Lippincott, Mary 1823 wife of William Buzby, Daniel 1725, Hannah 1728 wife of Caleb Lippincott, John and Jonathan (twins) 1730, Aaron 1734, of whom further, and Moses 1737.(d)

By his will of 29 November 1760, proved 9 December next, this Daniel³ Wills of Northampton Twp., made bequests to his eldest son Daniel, to his sons Aaron and Moses, to his daughters Mary widow of William Buzby, Hope wife of Benjamin Lippincott, and Hannah wife of Caleb Lippincott, and ordered his lands to be sold by the executors.(1)

By a deed of 17 November 1770, Daniel⁴ Wills (the eldest son of Daniel³ Wills abovesaid) of Northampton Twp., conveyed to Aaron⁴ Wills (his brother) for 1000 Pounds 300 acres there, the ancestral homestead, reciting that John Wills by his will 17 Sept. 1745 devised unto his grandson Daniel Wills (the grantor) "the part of that tract of land which he the same John Wills had from his father and on which same John then lived", describing it as beginning at a post by Rancocas Creek, a corner to Asher Woolman's land, thence along his line North 20 degrees East 72.50 chains to a post corner to land devised to John Wills, thence by the same North 58 degrees 30 minutes West 30.40 chains to a post in the line of Moses Wills, thence by his line South 21 degrees 30 minutes West 82.30 chains to a post by Rancocas Creek, thence up the creek to the beginning post, "together with all and singular the houses, edifices, buildings", etc. (Recorded in West New Jersey Deed Bk. A-E, p. 163)

(1) N. J. Archives, Vol. 32, p. 360 (Abstract of Wills)

Aaron⁴ Wills, the grantee abovesaid, a younger son of Daniel³ Wills, then took possession, moving there from his plantation across the road in Willingborough Twp., and died 29th of 4th mo. 1805 aged 72 years. By his wife Rachel, daughter of Henry Warrington of Moorestown, Aaron Wills had issue: Joseph b. 8-16-1761 who d. 2-7-1846, and Samuel b. 6-7-1765, of whom further. (d and h) The initials A^{WR} over the figures 1786 built into the brickwork of the west gable end of the house here considered are obviously those of this Aaron Wills and his wife Rachel for whom this old homestead of his grandfather John² Wills was rebuilt in that year.

By his will of 22 July 1805, Aaron⁴ Wills abovenamed of Northampton devised "unto my son Samuel Wills all that tract of land and plantation whereon he and myself now dwell, with the appurtenances thereunto belonging, which I purchased of my brother Daniel Wills, containing 200 acres more or less, bounded on the south by Rancocas Creek, on the east by Samuel Haines' land, on the north by land late of Thomas Elton, on the west by Moses Wills, part of which said tract I having conveyed to my son Samuel by deed". (Burlington County Will Bk. A p. 70)

Samuel⁵ Wills, younger son and devisee abovenamed, born 7th of 6 mo. 1765, thus succeeded his father in the ancestral homestead as enlarged by the latter, died there 20th of 9 mo. 1852 aged 88 years and was buried(h) in Rancocas Friends burying ground northwest of the house. "He was a quiet and unostentatious man, of good mind, and an active member of Friends Society at Rancocas and the Monthly Meeting of Burlington, much interested in gathering historical data, Indian relics, and genealogical facts regarding his ancestors". (d) By his wife Grace Rogers (who died 15th of 9 mo. 1825) daughter of William and Grace (Allen) Rogers of Evesham Twp., he had issue: Aaron b. 6-1-1791, Hannah b. 1794, Ann b. 1799, wife of George Williams of Penna., and Daniel b. 26-6-1803, of further. (h)

In his will of 14 February 1831, proved 11 October 1852, Samuel Wills of Northampton Twp., abovesaid, devised to "my son Daniel Wills all the

remainder on the south end of my farm or plantation, situated in the Township of Northampton, being part of the same farm which I became possessed of by the last will and testament of my father Daniel Wills, containing 117 acres, 3 rods, 15 perches", and to his son Aaron the upper or north part of the farm. (Burlington Co. Will Bk. H. p. 67)

Daniel⁶ Wills, son and devisee above-named, born 26 of 6 mo. 1803 in the homestead (here considered) died elsewhere in Northampton Twp., 20th of 7 mo. 1878, having allowed his son William R. Wills to occupy it. He was a farmer, member of the Board of Freeholders for many years, a founder of the Burlington County Agricultural Society, active in politics, and a member of Rancocas Meeting of Friends. By his wife Susanna Richardson, whom he married 23 October 1828, and who died 3rd of 6 mo. 1861 aged 57 years, daughter of Joseph and Rebecca Richardson of Bucks County, Penna., Daniel Wills had issue: Ann b. 10-3-1830 wife of Joseph W. Lippincott of Moorestown, William R. of whom further, Elizabeth R. b. 20-12-1833, wife of George D. Hilyard of New York City, Susanna d. 31-3-1838, Clayton N. b. 21-10-1839, of Philadelphia, George W. d. 27-8-1844 aged 16 mos., and Hannah C. b. 14-12-1846. (d and h)

By his will of 16 November 1871, proved 3 August 1878, this Daniel⁶ Wills of Northampton Twp.*, devised to "my son William R. Wills all my farm where he now resides, situated in the Township of Westhampton*, if he shall elect to take the same..... at a fair valuation". Within three months, the son William R. Wills elected so to take the homestead farm, agreeing with his brothers and sisters, Anna W. Lippincott, Clayton N. Wills, Hannah C. Wills, and Elizabeth R. Hilyard, to a valuation of \$9,200. Accordingly, the latter named heirs of Daniel Wills confirmed the farm to their brother by deed of 27 December 1879, in which the acreage is stated as 92.62.

*The house surveyed is in that part of Northampton Twp. set off as Westhampton in 1850.

William R. Wills of Westhampton Twp., born 5th of 10 mo. 1831, elder son and devisee abovenamed, lived in the house at the date of his father's will devising it to him as stated. In his will of 6 November 1887, he authorized his executors to sell any part or all of his real estate. Accordingly, the latter conveyed to Amos Gibbs of Mt. Holly, in same County, by their deed of 26 March 1888, his said 92.62 acre home-stead farm (here considered) in Westhampton Township.

Gibbs and wife Louisa S. of Mt. Holly, conveyed 85 acres thereof to Frank M. Fox of Philadelphia by their deed of 24 September 1898, and he with wife Anna V., being still of Philadelphia passed it to Samuel L. Walker of the same city on 29 December next. By deed of 8 September 1904, William H. Walker and others, of Westhampton Twp., administrators of said Samuel L. Walker, conveyed the same 85 acre farm to Catherine Coumbe of Lumberton Township, wife of Robert E. Counbe, and she evidently occupied the same when as a widow she conveyed it by her deed of 22 May 1930 to W. J. Boyd of Masonville. Boyd and wife passed it to Alfred Bauman of Philadelphia on 25 November 1932, and he removing thereon passed it in turn to Frank McIlvaine of Edgewater Park Township by deed of 31 July 1937, which grantee remains the owner and occupant at the time of our survey of the house in 1940. In the deed of 26 March 1888, as in those subsequent, the bounds of the farm are described as beginning at a stake standing in the road leading from Centreton to Rancocas, in the line of Lundy's land and at the end of the lane leading to the house on said farm, and 10.44 chains distant from the center of the north abutment of the Centreton Bridge over Rancocas Creek and runs thence northeast along the road (but around the small plot of the Friends Burying Ground thereon), which road divides Willingboro Township from Westhampton, a total of some 2125

feet, to Joseph Borton's land, thence southeast some 1755 feet, thence southwest to Rancocas Creek, and thence down the same to the place of beginning, containing 85 acres.

Bibliography:

A search of title in Land and Probate records of Burlington County and in those deposited in the Office of the Secretary of State by Oscar F. Benjamin, H.A.B.S. abstractor

Louis D. Cook
Supervising Historian

Approved:

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District Officer